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ABSTRACT

Researchers have identified six experiences that promote reflective teaching: (1) teaching experiences; (2) journal writing; (3) peer observations; (4) receiving notes/feedback from peer observations; (5) self-assessment; and (6) consultation/conversation with the university supervisor. In this study, these experiences were included as essential components of a music and related arts methods course for undergraduate elementary and early childhood education majors. The purpose of the study was to examine the students' perceptions of the usefulness of those experiences and the amount of thought and reflection required. Teaching experiences included brief peer teaching episodes and laboratory teaching experiences in an elementary classroom. Students were required to keep a journal, observe a peer teacher, and complete a self-evaluation inventory at the conclusion of the laboratory teaching experiences. Instructors provided written feedback and encouraged discussions about problems and teaching strategies. The journal, a teaching philosophy paper, artifacts from teaching experiences, and other evidence of professional growth and development were assembled to create a portfolio for evaluation. Finally, students were asked to complete an anonymous "Reaction Inventory" to rate each class activity on usefulness and reflection requirements. The data indicated that students found the laboratory teaching experience to be the most useful and to require the most thought and reflection. Results suggest that education students may require an external impetus to promote reflection and that teacher education courses include the six experiences listed above. (Contains 15 references.) (ND)

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PROMOTING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION MAJORS IN AN ELEMENTARY MUSIC METHODS COURSE

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Background

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) define reflective practice "as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development" (p. 19). While it is generally acknowledged that reflective practice is important for acquisition of fundamental teaching competencies in novice teachers and for continued growth and development in experienced teachers (e.g., Brubaker, 1994; Cruickshank, 1985; Francis, 1994; Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Grimmett, et al., 1990; Laboskey, 1994; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Reagan, Case, & Norlander, 1993; Ross, 1990; Schon, 1987), it is also apparent that this kind of reflection does not occur without some kind of impetus. For some teachers, that impetus may be internal, driven by values and a sincere interest in professional development. For others, however, the impetus must be external (Bracey, 1987). This is particularly true of preservice teachers who, due to lack of maturity and experience, "may arrive without the internal motivation to engage in reflective thinking in general or in particular" (Laboskey, 1994, p. 11). We cannot assume that preservice teachers come to us primed and ready to engage in reflective practice. Teacher educators must, therefore, devise effective ways to facilitate reflection (Reagan, Case, & Norlander, 1993; Harris & Wear, 1993).

Some researchers have argued that critical thinking develops during the mid to late twenties and that the typical college student (in her/his late teens to early twenties) is not capable of mature reflective judgement (Bowen, 1987). Other studies, however, suggest that evidence of reflective practice among young, preservice teachers can increase under appropriate conditions (e.g., Gunnels & Lumpkin, 1994; Laboskey, 1994; Posner, 1985).

Researchers have identified a number of experiences that tend to promote reflective teaching including: participating in teaching experiences (Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Gunnels & Lumpkin, 1994; Reagan, Case, & Norlander, 1993), journal writing (Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Gunnels & Lumpkin, 1994; Laboskey, 1994), participating in peer observations (Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Laboskey, 1994), receiving notes/feedback from peer observations (Cruickshank, 1985; Laboskey, 1994; Reagan, Case, & Norlander, 1993), self assessment (Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993), and consultation/conversation with the university supervisor (Laboskey, 1994).

In the present study, the aforementioned experiences were included as essential components of an elementary music and related arts methods course for undergraduate education majors. The purpose of the study was to examine the students' perceptions of how useful those experiences "will be to you when you become a teacher" and "how much thought and reflection" were required.

Methods

Subjects participating in this study were 46 (45 female, 1 male) undergraduate elementary education and early childhood education majors enrolled in two sections of an elementary music and arts methods course. However, since one subject did not complete all phases of the study, only 45 subjects (44 female, 1 male) are represented in data analysis and results.

Teaching experiences in the methods course included brief peer teaching episodes (two 5-10 minute "micro" teaching presentations in the university classroom) and laboratory teaching experiences in an elementary classroom (six 30-minute lessons). Students were required to keep a journal in which they recorded their reactions to and thoughts about all experiences encountered during the course. In conjunction with the laboratory teaching experience, students were also required to observe a peer and to complete a peer observation form. The completed peer

observation forms were first submitted to the instructor and ultimately became the property of the person who was observed. Each student was required to complete a detailed self evaluation inventory at the conclusion of the laboratory teaching experience. The instructor provided written feedback after both "micro" teaching experiences and after observations during the laboratory experience (the instructor observed each student at least twice during laboratory teaching). Throughout the course, the instructor allocated a specific portion of class time (every Monday, approximately 30-minutes each week) to promote informal discussion about problems encountered during teaching and strategies for achieving more effective teaching. It is important to note, however, that such discussion was not *restricted* to that scheduled time. This type of discussion also took place at other times throughout the week, whenever students expressed special concern or interest.

Student journals, a teaching philosophy paper, captioned artifacts from their teaching experiences (such as lesson plans, teacher-made materials, and student products), and other evidence of professional growth and development throughout the course (most students included peer observation and instructor feedback as well as self evaluations) were assembled to create a teacher's portfolio which was shared with the instructor during an individual exit conference scheduled with each student during the final week of the term.

At the conclusion of the course, students were asked to complete an anonymous *Reaction Inventory* calling upon them to rate each class activity according to "How useful will it be?" and "How much thought and reflection did it require?" on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (none) to 5 (very much). Students were also invited to write other "comments or suggestions."

Results

Descriptive statistics indicate that students generally found all class experiences useful with the *laboratory teaching experience* receiving the highest mean rating (4.93)

and the *journal* receiving the lowest mean rating (3.09). Reactions concerning how much thought and reflection various activities required were also relatively positive with the highest mean rating for the *laboratory teaching experience* (4.89) and the lowest mean rating for receiving *feedback from peers who observed me* (3.27). (See Table 1 for a summary of descriptive statistics for each item.)

Paired t-tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) differences between students' ratings of *how useful* an activity was and *how much thought and reflection* an activity required for seven of the fourteen course activities. Activities receiving significantly higher ratings for *usefulness* than for *thought and reflection* included lesson plans for laboratory teaching, receiving feedback from peers, participating in class discussion about teaching, and observing peers' teaching. Activities receiving significantly higher ratings for promoting *thought and reflection* than for *usefulness* included peer teaching experiences, completing a self evaluation, and journal writing. (See Table 2 for results of paired t-tests.)

Twenty-two of the students elected to write additional comments expressing highly favorable reactions to the "practical" field experiences ($n = 8$), class discussions about teaching ($n = 6$), the course in general ($n = 6$), and the final portfolio ($n = 3$). Some students expressed negative reactions to journal writing ($n = 3$) and expectations for the course (e.g., grading too hard, $n = 2$).

Discussion

Relatively high ratings for both *usefulness* and *thought and reflection* for all items included in the study suggest that these research-based experiences were perceived by education students as appropriate learning activities. Typical comments such as "I think everything we did was very important and beneficial," "To be honest, I can't really suggest anything to be cut" and "Everything we did in class will be very much a part of my classroom" indicate a generally favorable student attitude about the

validity of course requirements. (Two students did, however, express dissatisfaction about the stringency of the instructor's grading criteria.)

It is not surprising that the laboratory teaching experience and the lesson plans prepared for that experience were ranked first and second, respectively, for both future usefulness and for the amount of thought and reflection required. Certainly, the literature supports the value of field experiences for initiating student teachers into the realm of professional thought and behavior (e.g., Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Gunnels & Lumpkin, 1994). The literature also suggests that inexperienced teachers tend to approach teaching from a short-term view and place more emphasis upon themselves than upon their students. Student teachers may find it difficult to reflect upon on educational theory and metaphor. A "learn by doing" approach is generally favored in which the student relies upon personal experiences for gaining knowledge about teaching (LaBoskey, 1994). This orientation toward "hands-on" experiences also explains the significant differences observed between ratings for *usefulness* and *thought and reflection* for many items. While these inexperienced teachers may have acknowledged that an experience, such as self evaluation, required a great deal of thought and reflection, they may not view that experience as being as potentially useful as products developed during their laboratory teaching such as lesson plans or a homemade musical instrument.

The literature identifies journal writing as an important tool for developing reflective practice in educators (Freiberg & Waxman, 1990; Gunnels & Lumpkin, 1994; Laboskey, 1994). In this study, however, the journal was ranked last for usefulness and eleventh ("next-to-last") for requiring thought and reflection. Perhaps the best explanation for the relatively low ratings for journal writing is found in the students' own words: "The journals were a little hard to keep up with, I found myself forgetting to write them. . ." "I did not like doing the informal journal, but that was just probably out of laziness. . ." "I found the journal not as useful as I would imagine

you think it is--it was more of a recording of daily events [and] feelings. I honestly didn't get much out of it." Certainly, if students "forgot" to write their journals, were "lazy" about journal writing, or viewed it simply as "a recording of daily events," then the experience would have been of little value. Students were instructed (through class discussion and in the course syllabus) to write in their journals on a daily basis, keeping "an informal, handwritten account of your personal reactions to your experiences during class meetings and laboratory teaching" and that journals "should provide evidence of thought and reflection." It is apparent, however, that some students either did not understand the journal writing assignment, or were simply not motivated to invest the time and effort required for thoughtful journal writing.

Receiving feedback from observations has been identified as an aid to developing reflective practice in teachers (Cruickshank, 1985; Laboskey, 1994; Reagan, Case, & Norlander, 1993). The students in the present study, however, ranked peer feedback last for *thought and reflection*. It is likely that student reactions to this experience were influenced by conflicts in laboratory teaching schedules which made it prohibitive for some students to be observed by peers, and by the quality of the written feedback from peer observations which varied from thoughtful to very superficial.

Recommendations

Results of the present study are consistent with the literature, indicating that education students may require an external impetus to promote reflection and that certain types of experiences are conducive to developing reflective teaching. It is recommended, therefore, that teacher education courses include the following types of experiences:

Teaching experiences. Most education students view teaching from a relatively narrow, self-centered perspective. Hands-on experiences including peer teaching as well as field experiences are perceived as very useful and valid by students and provide an

excellent incentive for the beginning stages of reflective practice. As one student noted: "Personal experiences can help a person learn much more than reading from a book."

Journal writing. Journal writing can be an aid to reflection, a personal "sounding board" for students to work through teaching problems and concerns. The lack of interest in journal writing observed in some students in this study, however, points out the need for the instructor to structure the course to promote more thoughtful and consistent journal entries. Setting aside times throughout the course for sharing journals among peers could be a useful strategy for increasing student interest and motivation.

Peer observation. Observing peers gives students a broader perspective of classroom dynamics and a greater palette of teaching strategies and situations from which to draw. Receiving thoughtful feedback from peers can give students an objective view of their teaching which can be an excellent stimulus for promoting reflection. It is important, however, for the instructor to structure the experience so that students are equipped with observation skills and motivated to provide peer feedback of consistently high quality.

Self assessment. Self assessment is a useful tool for promoting student reflection, and ultimately, reflective practice. In the present study, a self evaluation narrative calling upon students to respond to a series of topics regarding their laboratory teaching, a teaching philosophy paper, and a teacher's portfolio (captions explaining the rationale for including various components were required) were perceived as both useful and requiring thought and reflection by students (and the instructor).

Consultation/conversation with university supervisor. When the instructor actively promotes discussion about teaching among students, a powerful model about the importance of *thinking about teaching* is presented. Teaching to promote reflective practice requires an investment of time and energy from students and the instructor.

The class calendar must be adjusted to include time for class discussion about teaching and for individual conversation between each student and the university supervisor. The present study provided for at least 30 minutes each week for class discussion and for a 15-minute individual conference with the instructor at the end of the term. This was perceived as being very useful by most students. Typical comments included: "There aren't many classes in which we discuss controversy--the things we discussed are important and I'm glad we discussed them." "I truly enjoyed talking about teaching in class--taking others' experiences and learning from them." It is also recommended that at least one additional 15-minute individual student-instructor conference be included approximately mid-way through the course to facilitate even more dialogue about teaching.

Conclusion

Reflective practice is essential for professional growth and development in teaching, a process that, once initiated, continues throughout a teacher's career (perhaps lifetime). Preservice teachers may lack the internal motivation and/or the experiential framework to engage in reflective practice. It is important, therefore, to promote actively reflection and reflective teaching in university education courses. Research provides strategies that can serve as a starting point for nurturing reflection among education students, experiences that can be an impetus for young teachers to engage in the process of reflective practice.

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Table 1

Mean ratings and rankings for learning experiences

Learning Experience	How useful will it be?		How much thought and reflection did it require?	
	ranking	mean	ranking	mean
Teaching a song to peers	6	4.36	7	4.31
Bulletin board (lab product)	8	4.11	8	4.11
Homemade instrument	6	4.36	6	4.33
Laboratory lesson plans	2	4.67	2	4.84
Laboratory teaching	1	4.93	1	4.89
Program at lab school	9	4.05	10	3.86
Completing peer obs.	11	3.51	10	3.86
Feedback from peers	10	4.00	12	3.27
Class discussions	5	4.49	7	4.31
Teaching lesson to peers	4	4.56	3	4.80
Observing peers' teaching in university classroom	4	4.56	9	4.02
Self evaluation inventory	7	4.14	5	4.45
Final portfolio	3	4.60	4	4.76
Journal	12	3.09	11	3.42

N = 45

Note: Rating scale ranged from 0 (none) to 5 (very much).

Table 2

Results of paired samples t-tests comparing ratings for usefulness and for thought and reflection for course experiences

Learning Experience	Useful			Thought and reflection			DF	probability
	mean	SD	error	mean	SD	error		
Teaching a song to peers	4.36	.743	.111	4.31	.763	.114	44	.660
Bulletin board (lab product)	4.11	.910	.136	4.11	.885	.132	44	1.000
Homemade instrument	4.36	.802	.120	4.33	.707	.105	44	.872
Laboratory lesson plans	4.67	.769	.115	4.84	.424	.063	44	.044
Laboratory teaching	4.93	.255	.038	4.89	.387	.058	43	.160
Program at lab school	4.05	1.056	.159	3.86	1.133	.171	43	.210
Completing peer obs.	3.51	1.092	.166	3.86	.941	.143	42	.133
Feedback from peers	4.00	1.434	.246	3.27	1.577	.271	33	.000
Class discussions	4.49	.707	.109	4.31	.924	.143	41	.018
Teaching lesson to peers	4.56	.813	.121	4.80	.457	.068	44	.010
Observing peers' teaching in university classroom	4.56	.622	.094	4.02	1.000	.151	43	.000
Self evaluation inventory	4.14	.979	.148	4.45	.820	.124	43	.007
Final portfolio	4.60	.780	.116	4.76	.609	.091	44	.070
Journal	3.09	1.294	.193	3.42	1.055	.157	44	.024

N = 45

Note: Rating scale ranged from 0 (none) to 5 (very much).